



Don't Let Harvest Rush Lead to Manure Runoff

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Contact: Donna Gilson
608-224-5130, donna.gilson@wi.gov
Bill Cosh, Communications Director
608-224-5020, William2.Cosh@wi.gov

MADISON – As crops come off the field and winter looms not so far away, farmers may scramble to get manure pits cleaned out – and if the autumn is rainy, that can spell trouble.

"Right now the September-through-November forecast from the National Weather Service gives us equal chances of getting above- or below-normal rainfall, so it could be a rainy fall. One good downpour or a string of rainy days could carry manure straight to streams if you're not careful," says Sara Walling, water quality section leader with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

Farmers have a tool that can help them make decisions about when to spread manure. The Runoff Risk Advisory Forecast is part of the online Wisconsin Manure Management System (www.manureadvisorysystem.wi.gov). It provides maps that are updated three times a day to show short-term manure runoff risk, taking into consideration soil moisture, weather forecast, crop cover, and slope. Farmers can check it to see how risky it will be to spread manure in their watershed basin.

Along with checking the forecast, farmers who have nutrient management plans should be spreading manure based on the plan. Almost a third of Wisconsin's 9 million acres of cropland is covered by a nutrient management plan. For information about making a nutrient management plan, farmers should talk to their crop advisors, call their county conservationists, or visit datcp.wi.gov.

"We know farmers want to get their manure pits emptied before winter sets in and makes spreading more difficult, but right now, there's still time and we encourage them to use caution – and to use the advisory forecast," Walling said. "Whenever you have to spread manure, follow your nutrient management plan because it includes all site-specific risk areas on your farm. . If you don't have a plan, talk to your crop consultant or county conservationist to develop one. They may also help you find alternatives to spreading in risky conditions. You might be able to stack manure away from lakes and streams, drinking water wells, and sinkholes or exposed bedrock. If you can't avoid spreading, they can help you identify fields where the risk is lowest. If you don't know how to find your county conservationist, go to datcp.wi.gov and search for 'conservation directory'."

In addition, farmers should have an emergency plan in place in case the worst does happen. You can find information about emergency planning at dnr.wi.gov. Search for "manure spills." Spills or runoff must be reported immediately by calling 1-800-943-0003.

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